



Customer Service Representatives

LOGISTICS

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Job Overview

Customer Service Representatives are an integral part of the company's sales team. They are a direct link from the company to the customer. Primarily offering service via the telephone or the Internet, they handle both new and established customers, answer questions, or provide help with problems according to company guidelines. They take orders for products or services, answer delivery questions, find replacement part numbers, and perform other sales support functions. They help keep the customer informed as to delivery time and order status. They may enter customer data into a computer database.

Customer Service Representatives must maintain an ongoing awareness and understanding of active promotions in order to increase sales and customer awareness. As part of the sales team, they may have sales goals to meet and also support company employees in the field.

Representatives frequently enter information into a computer as they are speaking to customers on the telephone. At times, they may need to transfer a call to a supervisor if they encounter a situation to which they do not know how to respond. Conversations are often required to be kept within set time limits in order to fairly distribute their time among the people who require assistance.

Customer Service Representatives must be able to function in a fast-paced and challenging environment while having the ability to multitask various activities. Representatives may work in offices, warehouses, shipping and receiving call centers, inventory control, and operations resolving customer complaints.

Typical Tasks

- Confer with customers by telephone or in person in order to provide information about products and services, to take orders or cancel accounts, or to obtain details of complaints.
- Keep records of customer interactions and transactions, recording details of inquiries, complaints, and comments, as well as actions taken.
- Resolve customers' service or billing complaints by performing activities such as exchanging merchandise, refunding money, and adjusting bills.
- Check to ensure that appropriate changes were made to resolve customers' problems.
- Contact customers in order to respond to inquiries or to notify them of claim investigation results and any planned adjustments.

Customer Service Representatives

- ➔ Determine charges for services requested, collect deposits or payments, and arrange for billing.
- ➔ Complete contract forms, prepare change of address records, and issue service discontinuance orders, using computers.
- ➔ Obtain and examine all relevant information in order to assess validity of complaints and to determine possible causes, such as extreme weather conditions that could increase utility bills.
- ➔ Solicit sale of new or additional services or products.
- ➔ Review claims adjustments with dealers, examining parts claimed to be defective and approving or disapproving dealers' claims.
- ➔ Compare disputed merchandise with original requisitions and information from invoices, and prepare invoices for returned goods.

*Detailed descriptions of this occupation may be found in the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) at online.onetcenter.org.*

Important Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities

- ➔ Active Listening — Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
- ➔ Reading Comprehension — Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work-related documents.
- ➔ Time Management — Managing one's own time and the time of others.
- ➔ Service Orientation — Actively looking for ways to help people.
- ➔ Customer and Personal Service — Knowledge of principles and processes for providing customer and personal services. This includes customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluation of customer satisfaction.
- ➔ Oral Expression — The ability to communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.
- ➔ Deductive Reasoning — The ability to apply general rules to specific problems to produce answers that make sense.
- ➔ Problem Sensitivity — The ability to tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong. It does not involve solving the problem, only recognizing there is a problem.

Work Environment

Customer Service Representatives work in clean and well-lit areas. Many work in offices and call or customer contact centers. They usually have their own workstation equipped with a telephone, headset, fax machine, and computer. Representatives work early morning, evening, or late-night shifts. Weekend or holiday work may be required.

The noise level in call centers is usually moderate and daily tasks may be repetitious and stressful, with little time between calls. Representatives are frequently required to sit for extended periods of time, looking at a computer screen. Eye and muscle strain, backaches, headaches, and repetitive motion injuries can be avoided by applying ergonomic principles.

Customer Service Representatives are required to be pleasant, helpful, and display a cooperative attitude. It may require being careful about detail and thorough in completing work tasks.

Customer Service Representatives

Representatives may also be required to maintain composure and control anger when dealing with difficult or irate customers.

There has been little or no unionization of Customer Service Representatives within the logistics-related industry.

California's Job Outlook and Wages

The California Outlook and Wage table below represents the occupation across all industries.

Standard Occupational Classification	Estimated Number of Workers 2004	Estimated Number of Workers 2014	Average Annual Openings	2006 Wage Range (per hour)
Customer Service Representatives				
43-4051	199,300	252,000	8,230	\$11.98 to \$19.28

Wages do not reflect self-employment.

Average annual openings include new jobs plus net replacements.

Source: www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov, Employment Projections by Occupation and OES Employment & Wages by Occupation, Labor Market Information Division, Employment Development Department.

Trends

Employment for Customer Service Representatives is expected to grow at a faster than average rate from 2004 to 2014. Prospects for obtaining a job in customer service are expected to be excellent, with more job openings than job seekers. In particular, bilingual job seekers may enjoy favorable job prospects.

This occupation is well-suited for job seekers looking for flexible work schedules. Many opportunities for part-time work will be available as companies attempt to cut labor costs by hiring more temporary workers.

An estimated 52,700 job opportunities will be created by the need to replace Representatives who quit, retire, or leave the occupation for other reasons during the projected period.

Training/Requirements/Apprenticeships

A high school diploma or equivalent is required for most Customer Service Representatives. To be successful, basic computer knowledge and good interpersonal skills are essential for a worker to possess. Since Representatives frequently interact with the public, strong communication and problem-solving skills are a necessity. They must also be able to follow verbal and written instructions with minimal supervision within specified time frames. Experience from any public contact or activity would be beneficial for this job. Increasingly, the ability to speak a foreign language is becoming an asset.

Some employers look for people who have the ability to come across in a friendly and professional manner. The ability to deal patiently with problems and complaints, and to remain courteous when faced with difficult or angry customers, is crucial.

Recommended High School Course Work

High school courses in computer technology, English, and business are helpful.

Customer Service Representatives

Where Do I Find the Job?

Direct application to employers remains one of the most effective job search methods.

Use the *Search for Employers by Industry* feature on the *Career Center* page at www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov to locate employers in your area. Search under the following industry names to get a list of private firms and their addresses:

- ➔ Computer and Supply Merchant Wholesalers
- ➔ Direct Property and Casualty Insurers
- ➔ Electronic Shopping
- ➔ Farm Supplies Merchant Wholesalers
- ➔ Freight Transportation Arrangement
- ➔ General Freight Trucking, Local
- ➔ General Line Grocery Merchant Whsle
- ➔ General Warehousing and Storage
- ➔ Mail-Order Houses
- ➔ Office Administrative Services
- ➔ Offices of Other Holding Companies
- ➔ Other Business Service Centers
- ➔ Telephone Answering Services

Search these **yellow page** headings for listings of private firms:

- ➔ Banks
- ➔ Computer
- ➔ Financial Services
- ➔ Freight Forwarding
- ➔ Insurance
- ➔ Inventory Service
- ➔ Mailing Services
- ➔ Telecommunications
- ➔ Warehouses

Where Can the Job Lead?

This occupation provides ample opportunity for personal growth and development. Customer Service Representatives may advance to supervisory positions after they have gained experience. Success in this occupation may lead to sales or operations management.

Related Occupations

Computer Support Specialists (see *Occupational Guide No. 589*)
Telephone Operators and Switchboard Operators (see *Occupational Guide No. 54*)
Dispatchers, except Police, Fire, and Ambulance (see *Logistics Profile*)

Other Sources

American Marketing Association
www.marketingpower.com

California Association of Regional
Occupational Centers and Programs
www.carocp.org

International Customer Service Association
www.icsa.com

Logistics World
www.logisticsworld.com

Society for Marketing Professional Services
www.smps.org